

---

# Pro Rege

---

---

Volume 5 | Number 1

Article 9

---

September 1976

## Notebook of a Colonial Clergyman (Book Review)

Louis Y. Van Dyke

*Dordt College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro\\_rege](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege)

---

### Recommended Citation

Van Dyke, Louis Y. (1976) "Notebook of a Colonial Clergyman (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 5: No. 1, 35 - 36.

Available at: [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro\\_rege/vol5/iss1/9](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol5/iss1/9)

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Dordt Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Dordt Digital Collections. For more information, please contact [ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu](mailto:ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu).

President Gerald R. Ford (whom the authors identify as "an evangelical on the issue of personal faith in Christ").

There is a disturbing question raised by the book, but not raised in it. The question is, to what extent is there an attempt by these many Christians to integrate their faith with their politics and their positions on the issues with which they must deal—and perhaps particularly with their approach to and rationale for arriving at these positions. Does Christian commitment mean anything in terms of position and policy? A few references are found in the book which would suggest that some individuals are sensitive to this issue. For instance, Representative John B. Anderson (R-III.) is quoted as saying: "...we are called upon by...God not only to acknowledge His being, but to serve Him by serving His justice and His righteousness. He calls us not only to respect justice, and not only to abstain from evil, but to actively pursue justice" (p. 144). Again, Richard Wiley, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, is reported as saying: "My faith affects everything I do, the way I treat other people, the way I handle issues" (p. 151). That concern with this question is not entirely absent from the religious scene in Washington is attested to by the fact that one item debated, according to the authors, is the "basic" question, "does being a follower of Christ make a difference in the way one votes on knotty issues?" (p. 11). Nevertheless, the over-all impression left is that there has been relatively little attempt to relate politics and faith, neither on the level of thinking nor of action. Further, the authors fail, either in their interviewing or in the book itself, to discuss how the Christianity of politicians affects their thinking and how the presence of all these Christians affect the the government? The authors would have done a real service by exploring this issue to some extent instead of confining themselves to the relatively superficial level of introducing name upon name, prayer group upon prayer group.

The book also leaves the impression that the real heart of Washington Christianity is found in the many prayer groups that exist in almost every department, agency and office. This raises another question: Where is the church? It would seem that the role of the church is a secondary one, at best. Certainly the voluntary, often unstructured, laymen-led and laymen-organized prayer groups are outside of and in addition to the organized churches. The authors seem to suggest that, in respect to the spiritual sustenance of the participants, and often in regards to the centrality in their lives, the prayer groups, indeed, are far superior to the

churches. If Hefley and Plowman are right in this, it is not only an indictment of the churches for their shortcomings, but also an indication of a disturbing tendency to ignore the church as a fundamental resource in the Christian life.

The authors state that their "central purpose has been simply to chronicle a remarkable God-centered movement portending good news in an important time and locale saturated with bad news" (p. 197). In terms of this fairly limited objective, they have, to a great extent, succeeded. The book is informative and does convey to the reader something of the extent and vitality of Christianity in government circles in Washington. The chief disappointment with the book lies not so much in what the authors have done as in that which they have failed to do. Those who wish to be comforted by the presence of so many Christians in the corridors of power in Washington will find this book rewarding; those who wish in addition to discover what these Christians are doing in these corridors, and what influence they are bringing to bear, or what effect they are having, will find it less than satisfactory.

---

**Notebook of a Colonial Clergyman**, by Henry Melchior Muhlenberg. Translated and edited by Theodore C. Tappert and John W. Doberstein. Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1959, 1975. 245 pages. Reviewed by Louis Y. Van Dyke, Professor of History.

---

Henry M. Muhlenberg, a Lutheran clergyman from Saxony, came to the New World in 1742 at the age of thirty one to minister to German immigrants in the Philadelphia area. Muhlenberg lived through the eventful years of the birth of the United States, and he died in 1787 just a few weeks after the Constitutional Convention had completed its work. Two of his sons played an active role in founding the new nation. Peter Muhlenberg was a Brigadier General in the Continental Army while Frederick Muhlenberg was the first speaker in the United States Congress.

Henry Muhlenberg kept a daily journal of his observations, written in German, which grew to a collection of two dozen volumes in manuscript form. The present work represents a distillation of those twenty volumes which fact constitutes a problem in trying to evaluate the author and his times. The book makes no reference to many significant events and the reader simply is unable to determine whether this is due to editing or to Muhlenberg's lack of interest in those occurrences. The diary fails to

note the Boston Massacre, the Tea Party, the Intolerable Acts, the First Continental Congress, Lexington and Concord, the Second Continental Congress, Saratoga, the French Alliance, Valley Forge, or the Treaty of Paris. Muhlenberg does comment on the turn of affairs upon occasion, however. At the time of independence, he cited Romans 13 and argued that, "Contending parties cannot be their own judges, and private persons possess no infallible scales to weigh without error the preponderant arguments of both sides" (164). He further questioned whether the people of Pennsylvania "would allow themselves to be governed under a new form by men who did not profess the Christian religion" (165). He inquired, "Are these many thousands of souls to be governed by men who neither believe nor confess the Saviour of the world and his Word?" (165). By the time of Yorktown, however, Muhlenberg had changed his mind. He stated, "The event in Virginia clearly shows that the sublime Saviour has accepted a prevailing intercession for the unfruitful fig tree in his vineyard and has allowed that it should not be hewn down and cast into the fire but rather be digged and manured" (224). There is no attempt to rationalize this change in attitude and again the reader is at a loss as to whether the omission is due to editing or to lack of reflection upon Muhlenberg's part.

On the other hand, the diary is filled with commentary upon daily routine and the reader glimpses intimately that part of colonial life that is usually omitted from textbooks. The clergyman records his problems with dissident church members, the hazards and hardships of serving several congregations simultaneously, and the primitive nature of colonial medicine. His numerous references to infant burials at which he officiated attest to the high infant mortality rate.

To those who are seeking evidence as to the role of clergymen and instituted religion in the formation of American political theory and its implementation, the book will be a disappointment. However, to those who wish to catch a glimpse of the "underside" of American history, to observe the lives of those colonials whose activities were not considered newsworthy, the diary offers rewarding reading.

---

**Aid for the Overdeveloped West**, by Bob Goudzwaard, Wedge Publishing Foundation, Toronto, Ontario, 1975. 89 pages, \$3.50 (paper).

---

This book by Goudzwaard is a compilation

of articles written for various Christian publications. The theme in each case is some variation of the economic problem of scarce resources and the way in which Christians must view these problem areas. Although we may initially suspect some discontinuity as a result of the fragmented structure, the theme in each essay is similar enough so that continuity of thought is maintained throughout.

The emphasis of the book is on the development of thought patterns which integrate biblical teachings with economic problems currently receiving discussion. One outstanding problem which Goudzwaard deals with extensively is the consumption of resources in western countries. In this discussion Goudzwaard joins Malthus and other doomsday prophets in pointing out the dismal consequences of extreme rates of production and consumption. More importantly, he examines the underlying attitudes which are portrayed by society in these actions. High consumption rates are evidence of man's turning from biblical principles to materialistic desires in search of meaning for life. Our socio-economic lifestyles are confessions of what we believe. Christians are called to a lifestyle which differs substantially from those around us.

In addition to focusing on economic growth, the author extends biblical directives to other areas of discussion. For example, insight is given into the problem of industrial and labor relations. Problems arise primarily out of misunderstandings over responsibilities on both sides. Improper views of enterprise coupled with desires to promote one's own self interest intensify and aggravate decision making. Controversy over which type of economic system is biblical is another area which Goudzwaard presents as a misapplication of Scripture.

The overall message presented by the author is that we must apply our Christian values to economic areas of decision making. Although we often claim scriptural direction in our lives, the economic area is one in which our "confessions" are often contradictory. Unlike many other writers, Goudzwaard analyzes methods by which incorporation will be made effective.

An understanding of economic principles is not enough for the Christian. These principles must be examined to see if they are truly acceptable. This series of articles is an excellent discussion of how these principles should be applied in our lives. It helps to organize a Christian approach to economic problems as well as to give insights into judging the important issues.